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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HO CHI MINH CITY 001270

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOC](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [PREF](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: HCMC POLITICAL ACTIVIST INVOLUNTARILY COMMITTED TO MENTAL HOSPITAL

REF: HCMC 925; B) HCMC 1009; C) 05 HCMC 994

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1. (SBU) On November 3, HCMC-based dissident leader Tran Khue reported to us that his colleague Bui Kim Thanh was taken by police for a psychiatric evaluation in HCMC. She was subsequently involuntarily committed to the national mental hospital in neighboring Dong Nai province. (Note: Thanh is affiliated with Khue's Democratic Party of Vietnam and is responsible for providing legal support and organizing individuals with land disputes in the south against the government. End Note.)

2. (SBU) Over the course of the following few days we spoke with the physician who examined Thanh initially in the HCMC, Thanh's husband, associates of Thanh in the land dispute movement, and another local mental health expert:

-- Our contact in the medical system told us that HCMC police ordered the psychiatric evaluation of Thanh. The police subsequently decided to transfer her to the national mental hospital. Thanh is confined to the ward for the criminally insane. Our contact noted that routine cases of mental illness involve only the families; direct police involvement reflects that this is a sensitive case for the authorities. He said that Thanh was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. She was ordered to remain under treatment for up to six months. Treatment includes the administration of anti-psychotic drugs.

-- Two of Thanh's associates in the land dispute movement told us that they visited her in the hospital on November 4. Thanh told them that she had been drugged and was sexually harassed by male patients in the ward. Thanh reportedly appeared tired and disoriented when they met. She apparently is refusing to eat, perhaps as a form of protest.

-- Thanh's husband works for a state-owned company in HCMC. He noted that his wife's propensity to "sue everyone" had caused him hardship in the past. (Per ref A, on August 15 the police accompanied Thanh's husband when he confronted Thanh at Tran Khue's house and sought to pressure her to end her involvement with the DPV.) In a meeting with us on November 6, Thanh's husband told us that his wife has a history of mental illness, and had been diagnosed with schizophrenia three times in the past, beginning in 1998. While he wanted to have her hospitalized before, she refused to go. Thanh's husband confirmed that police took the lead in the current case, first charging Thanh for "illegal activities" related to her land dispute organizing, and then committing her to the mental hospital.

-- Bui Kim Thanh is also known to our Refugee and Resettlement Section from her involvement in the late 1990s as the purported step-mother to an Amerasian. There is no indication of mental illness in her the file. The Amerasian was eventually issued a visa, but Thanh was denied for lack of credibility. Records show that about three months after she was removed from the case she created a scene at the information booth window at the Consulate and was escorted away by the RSO. A local Consulate employee also recalls that Thanh was oncea physics teacher in a local high school, but lost her job after she began speaking against the Communist Party in class.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: We met Bui Kim Thanh once in July in a meeting with Tran Khue. We also have been in periodic email contact with her over the past few months as well. Her writing is somewhat disjointed and rambling, but addressed the need for reform and attacked the Communist Party in strong terms. In our meeting she was garrulous and enthusiastic but coherent and appeared driven by her desire to reform the system and help individuals in need.

¶4. (SBU) Although it appears possible that Bui Kim Thanh suffers from some form of mental illness, the circumstances surrounding her involuntary committal are troubling. From what we have seen thus far, Thanh did not appear to be a threat to herself, her family, or others in the community. In this sense, her case is reminiscent of the case of Baptist Pastor Thanh Van Truong (ref C), who was involuntarily committed for nearly a year in the same mental institution by police after he wrote harsh political diatribes against the Communist Party. Pastor Truong also was diagnosed with schizophrenia.

¶5. (SBU) Thanh was deeply involved in the nascent land dispute protest movement centered in HCMC (ref B), which GVN authorities have made patently clear they want to end. Available evidence indicates that the she was involuntarily committed due to her association with Tran Khue and land protestors. We also note that the police have sought to label other dissidents --

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including Tran Khue -- as mentally ill. We raised Thanh's case with the Deputy Director of the HCMC External Relations Office on November 6, who claimed to know nothing of the case. He noted that the matter was an "internal affair of Vietnam" and technically Vietnam was not obligated to respond. However, as this was a sensitive time in our bilateral relationship he would investigate and inform us of his findings. We will continue to follow this case closely. End Comment.  
WINNICK